

Sir William Howe: A Study in Failed Strategic Leadership

by

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Class of 2013

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
<p>The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.</p>					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) xx-03-2013		2. REPORT TYPE STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Sir William Howe: A Study in Failed Strategic Leadership				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Colonel Brian Joseph. McHugh United States Army				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Professor Edward J. Filiberti Department of Command Leadership and Management				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Word Count: 11,639					
14. ABSTRACT <p>This paper examines the strategic leadership competencies of British General William Howe during the American Revolution (1775-1778). During the American War of Independence, General Howe displayed periodic tactical brilliance and operational competence but consistent strategic ineptitude. After arriving in America, Howe was quickly thrust into the position of Commander-in-Chief of British Forces and General of North America. Howe's lack of self awareness, ineptness in managing the personalities of his subordinate commanders, personal biases, and lack of political savvy resulted in the strategic failure of the British war effort. Howe's difficulty in transitioning from tactical, through operational to the strategic level provides a useful example as to the dramatically different challenges faced by current leaders as they prepare for and address similar challenges in our contemporary operational and strategic environment.</p>					
15. SUBJECT TERMS General Howe, American Revolution Campaigns of 1776 and 1777, Strategic Leadership Competencies					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 52	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UU	b. ABSTRACT UU	c. THIS PAGE UU			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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Abstract

Title: Sir William Howe:
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Report Date: March 2013

Page Count: 52

Word Count: 11,639

Key Terms: General Howe, American Revolution Campaigns of 1776 and 1777,
Strategic Leadership Competencies

Classification: Unclassified

This paper examines the strategic leadership competencies of British General William Howe during the American Revolution (1775-1778). During the American War of Independence, General Howe displayed periodic tactical brilliance and operational competence but consistent strategic ineptitude. After arriving in America, Howe was quickly thrust into the position of Commander-in-Chief of British Forces and General of North America. Howe's lack of self awareness, ineptness in managing the personalities of his subordinate commanders, personal biases, and lack of political savvy resulted in the strategic failure of the British war effort. Howe's difficulty in transitioning from tactical, through operational to the strategic level provides a useful example as to the dramatically different challenges faced by current leaders as they prepare for and address similar challenges in our contemporary operational and strategic environment.

Sir William Howe: A Study in Failed Strategic Leadership

The arrival of Major General William Howe to America in May of 1775 marked a pivotal point of the American Revolution. In Howe, Great Britain had the commander it wanted on the ground. Howe represented the cream of the British Army, an officer garnered in laurels from previous campaigns; he was “considered the best and most experienced commander that the Army had to offer.”¹ The heir apparent to General Thomas Gage, the belief amongst the circles of power in Britain was that Howe, an exceptional leader at the tactical and operational level, would continue his successful performance and bring the colonies back into the fold before the end of 1776.

Unfortunately, Howe would fall far short of these expectations. Instead, he botched the Revolution for the two years he commanded British Forces. At the end of this period he resigned his command and returned to Great Britain, his reputation severely diminished and the Revolutionary cause in a better position than it had been before his arrival.

What happened? How did the Crown’s hand-picked General, provided with the largest military force that Great Britain had ever deployed overseas, fail to prosecute a successful war against an unprofessional rabble of farmers, blacksmiths, and tradesmen? This paper examines this question through the lens of strategic leadership offering that it was General Howe’s failure to understand and adapt to the unique strategic demands of the Revolution that led to his failure. Throughout two years of war, Howe consistently missed numerous opportunities to decisively defeat the colonial Revolutionaries. These missed opportunities eventually led to his resignation and subsequent replacement by General Clinton.

Examining General Howe's conduct of the war using the United States Army War College (USAWC) strategic leadership framework provides an illustrative case study of the consequences of misapplication of related strategic leadership competencies. The purpose of this effort is to impress upon future senior leaders the importance and timeless relevance of these competencies to the overall strategic success.

The scope of this work is not meant to make the reader an expert in the American Revolution, General Howe's conduct during the war, or all aspects of strategic leadership. Instead, the paper will use specific examples throughout Howe's service to reveal his shortcomings as a strategic leader to provide insight for future leaders. To accomplish this, the paper provides a basic description of the USAWC's strategic leadership competencies followed by a description of General Howe's development prior to becoming Commander-in-Chief (CinC). Additionally, it provides an account of Howe's conduct during the war focusing on his ability to: (1) transition from the tactical and operational levels to the strategic level; (2) adapt and innovate to changes in the operational and strategic environment; and (3) exercise the necessary interpersonal skills to secure the required support and facilitate discourse to develop best solutions for the strategic campaign.

Strategic Leadership Competencies

An explanation on the strategic leadership competencies must first include a definition of the concept of strategic leadership. Although there are numerous definitions available, most reflect certain common competencies including: an ability to assess and understand the external environment and alignment of the organization's vision to the environment, a need for building consensus across a myriad of stakeholders to secure resources and political support as well as facilitate decisions,

and a requirement to manage change and formulate strategy that aligns ends, ways, and means in achieving a vision.²

Strategic leaders are constantly operating in an environment marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). To function in this environment they must be “an expert, not only in their own domain of war fighting and leading large military organizations, but also in the bureaucratic and political environment of the nation’s decision making process.”³ A strategic leader also has the responsibility of acting as the steward for his/her organization ensuring that professional ethics are at the forefront of all activities and setting the tone for acceptable actions within the organization. Successful strategic leaders must recognize that any perceived chink in their proverbial moral armor or tear in their cloth of selfless rather than selfish service can negatively impact the entire organization from within as well as from the outside. Finally, strategic leaders should possess a keen sense of self. This self awareness allows them to identify and take action to mitigate personal propensities, flaws, and biases in order to make objective decisions.

In order to meet the challenges of leading at the strategic level, senior leaders must embody certain competencies to achieve results. A principle frequently articulated at the senior leader level is “That which got you *here* is not going to get you *there*.” In short, being a good tactical leader does not translate into success at the strategic level. In studying strategic leadership it is clear that there are competencies that a leader must gain and refine to achieve success at the strategic level that are different than those required at the tactical or even operational levels. Current strategic leadership doctrine explains that although many of the competencies required in a strategic leader are the

same as those required from a leader at any level, some are vastly different. For example, like tactical leaders, strategic leaders must care for their subordinates but they must also be capable of envisioning long range requirements and possess integrative thinking skills.⁴ Related strategic leadership competencies can be categorized into three groups: conceptual (thinking skills needed to operate in a complex and ambiguous environment), technical (knowledge of external and internal political, economic and cultural systems that influence the organization), and interpersonal (consensus building and effective communication within and external to the organization).⁵

Conceptual Competencies:

Comprehensive conceptual competencies are particularly important at the strategic level in an environment of extreme complexity where clear solutions rarely exist and almost all alternatives have associated negative consequences. Operating in this type of complexity, strategic leaders must possess the mental acumen to determine underlying threads that connect issues and ascertain second and third order effects of their actions. In addition, strategic leaders must ensure long term gains are not sacrificed to short term success⁶ or that if they (long term gains) are sacrificed it is indeed a conscious decision.

Conceptual competencies include frame of reference development, problem management, and envisioning the future. Frame of reference development is a lens through which the leader views the world based on education, experiences, and self development. For a leader to develop an effective frame of reference the leader must continuously adapt that frame and be open new ideas and feedback from others, learn from past experiences, and be comfortable with abstract concepts.⁷ Problem

management involves: applying past experiences, identifying patterns, discarding irrelevant data, considering second and third order effects, maintaining flexibility and working interactively rather than individually to achieve an outcome that is most beneficial for the system as a whole.⁸ Finally, envisioning the future is the leader's ability to formulate and convey strategic aims and the development of strategic plans for mid-term and long- term programs facilitating the achievement of the aims. In this context the leader must understand the interaction of ends, ways, and means in formulating the strategy. An effective strategic leader envisions the future, sets goals that account for contingencies, and adapts the organization to changing environments.⁹

Technical Competencies

At the strategic level, technical competencies require a comprehensive “understanding of organizational systems, an appreciation of functional relationships outside the organization, and knowledge of the broader political and social system within which the organization operates.”¹⁰ Included in the technical competencies are: systems understanding, Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational (JIIM) relationships, and political and social competence. Systems understanding is a comprehension of how the organization fits within the nation and in relation to the nation's dealings with the international community. At the strategic level, a leader assumes various roles affecting numerous supporting and coordinating relationships. It is imperative that the leader not only understands these roles but also the associated duties and boundaries within each role. JIIM implies that strategic leaders must understand the different cultures, language and operating procedures of the various agencies, nations, and services with whom they operate in order to maximize potential. Political and social competence are those skills that allow a strategic leader to

effectively interact with the political powers in the development of policy, preparing strategy, and the securing of resources for support of the strategy.¹¹

Interpersonal Competencies

This third group of competencies consists of the leader's ability to interact both internal to the organization and externally across the diverse spectrum of people, organizations, and agencies that either are a part of or influence the organization. Key to interpersonal relations at the strategic level is the requirement that strategic leaders must influence and rely on the support of stakeholders outside their organization where there is no clear hierarchy of superior to subordinate role established.¹² The interpersonal competencies include: consensus building, negotiation, and communication. Consensus building is about developing a strategy that subsumes the key interests of the stakeholders. Building consensus, ensures all key organizations and personalities agree with the major aspects of the decision thus establishing credibility and common identity with the stakeholders. Consensus fosters improved relationships which help strategic leaders accomplish their objectives in a collaborative process. Negotiation is the ability to "communicate a clear position while still conveying willingness to compromise."¹³ The last of the interpersonal competencies is communication. Communication entails the ability to convey a clear, persuasive message internal to the organization and externally to others. Effective communication sets the conditions for successful consensus building and negotiations.¹⁴ Further, communications also entails the effective dialogue between leaders and the led and is conveyed in both a direct and indirect manner (through deeds as well as words).

This brief synopsis of strategic leadership presents a foundation for the examination of the performance of William Howe during the American Revolution. A

strategic leader is created from a lifetime of experience, education, and training.

Therefore, an overview of Howe's maturation through his formative years offers insight into his personality and propensities that underlie his development of key strategic competencies.

William Howe's Developmental Years

William Howe was born on August 10, 1729 in Cumberland, England the third son of Sir Emanuel Howe, the 2nd Viscount of Howe. Howe's family was well connected as Sir Emanuel was a member of Parliament and the Governor of Barbados and his mother was a cousin of King George. While this background cannot have hindered Howe in life, there is no indication that he relied on it to pad the road to his success. Instead, a young Howe showed a tendency for self-reliance and practicality. These tendencies, while a boon in his early years, caused interpersonal turmoil later in his career.

Like many of the famous 18th century British military leaders, Howe attended the Eton Academy. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Howe was not an astute student and did not move on to further his education at one of England's universities. Instead, Howe was an indifferent pupil who preferred adventure and carousing to books and contemplation.¹⁵ This penchant for "action" over serious study and reflection served Howe well as a tactical level leader. However, this same tendency hindered his performance at the strategic level where complexity abounds and long term effects of short term actions must always be considered.

Not recognizing the value of schooling, Howe left Eton at the age of 17 and procured a commission in the Army. His first assignment was as a Cornet in the Duke of Cumberland's Light Dragoons and by 1746 he was a Lieutenant fighting in the War of

Austrian Succession. Upon return from the War in 1749, Howe, because of his reputation as a reliable leader, was recruited and subsequently transferred to the 20th Regiment of Foot and promoted to Captain.

It was during his time with the 20th Foot that he began to emerge as a military officer of some renown. In 1758 Howe was given command of a battalion and subsequently deployed to America in support of the Seven Years' War. During the war, Howe distinguished himself several times. Probably his highest praise was that given by Major General James Wolfe for his actions during the battle of Louisburg. In describing Howe, Wolfe told King George that Howe commanded the best trained and most capable battalion in all of America.¹⁶ Although Wolfe was killed during the capture of Quebec, Howe continued to impress his superiors. Over the next two years, he commanded a regiment and then a brigade in the war. During this time, Howe solidified his reputation as he received accolades from Wolfe's successors General Townshend and General Murray. Returning to Europe, Howe played a role in the final chapters of the Seven Years' War. First as a Brigade Commander at the siege of Belle Isle and then as the Adjutant General of the forces which captured Havana. Throughout this period, Howe had compiled a "splendid record and his star was clearly in the ascendant."¹⁷ In the years between the wars Howe continued to build upon his reputation as a military man. Then in 1772, he was promoted to Major General and turned his attention to politics.

General Howe held two political positions at varying points during these years. First, he served as a member of the House of Commons and secondly, he held the position of Governor of the Isle of Wight from 1768-1772. A staunch Whig, Howe was

opposed to an aggressive policy towards the colonies. During the growing tensions of 1774, Howe voted against the Coercive Acts and, later that year, informed his constituents that if “a war with America should come and he should be offered a command in the British Army, he would decline.”¹⁸ However, within five months, he accepted a posting and was en route to Boston. In response to a letter written by one of his constituents condemning his acceptance of this posting, Howe provides a hint of his utter misconception of his operational environment and his personal bias towards the American Army. In summation, Howe explains that the insurgents are merely an undisciplined mob of rabble rousers who are very few in comparison to the whole people and who lack the stomach for conflict.¹⁹ General Howe then goes on to further expand that “*the few*, who I am told desire to separate themselves from Britain, I trust, when they find they are not supported in their frantic ideas by the more moderate, which I have described, they will, from fear of punishment, subside to the laws.”²⁰ In terms of a strategic assessment, General Howe is departing for the colonies with the belief that the opposition is a small minority of radicals whose will can easily be defeated by leveraging what he believed to be a supportive majority and a show of arms. His assessment did not reflect the growing Revolutionary fervor in America. Howe was to confront this fact first hand at the battle of Bunker Hill and at numerous succeeding encounters, yet he continuously failed to reconcile this misassessment with his strategy.²¹

In considering General Howe’s development up to assuming command in America, it is apparent why he was chosen to replace Major General Gage. Howe was an experienced officer who had earned the confidence of the leadership in England through exploits both on and off the battlefield. He also possessed knowledge of

politics and the workings of government. Finally, he was believed to be an officer who could act on initiative with the limited guidance that the tyranny of distance the war with America imposed. Therefore, in selecting General Howe to replace General Gage, Lord Germain expected that he “had a general not only experienced in tactics but capable of acting on his own initiative.”²²

A closer look at Howe’s development shows some flaws in this logic. First, Howe was not a student nor did he see the utility in spending time studying the ways of war and history of previous campaigns. Second, Howe was not known for his innovation but as a steady, common sense soldier able to act upon direction. Third, he was known for his self reliance in that he did not keep counsel with others. Finally, he had never been in a position to operate independently (his highest command up to this point having been at the brigade level). His first trial at the strategic level would be in an environment three thousand miles from his political masters against an adaptive enemy who would fight in an unconventional manner. All said, these shortcomings were not necessarily a recipe for disaster. However, they do give an appreciation of Howe’s initial preparedness in terms of his ability to meet the strategic challenges he would soon face. Thrust into duties as Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in America, Howe’s lack of experience and inability to develop the competencies required to operate at the strategic level would prove his demise.

General Howe, British CinC During the Revolution (1775-1778)

As Commander-in-Chief of the British Army of America Howe found himself confronted by a unique strategic environment. Up to his arrival in May of 1775 and even into that autumn, the British government was at odds on how to deal with the rebellion. While most agreed that the rebellion could be crushed by the military, many

questioned the appropriateness of doing so.²³ These competing perspectives resulted in a policy that “wavered between coercion and conciliation, vacillating between a punitive war to impose peace and an attempt to negotiate a settlement through appeasement.”²⁴ However, after the outcomes of 1775 and early 1776, a change in attitude occurred in England with the pendulum of opinion swinging towards coercion. By the winter of 1775, Britain viewed the situation as a military problem believing that “only the sword would bring the hard core revolutionaries to their knees.”²⁵ At the upper levels of leadership a changing of the guard occurred when the more moderate Lord Dartmouth was replaced by Lord Germain as the Secretary of State of the Colonies. Germain was an “enthusiastic advocate of force”²⁶ whose coercive stance was evidenced in his pledge that “were the Americans to persist in their obstinacy, the government would certainly provide the forces necessary to establish and maintain ‘the power of this country in America’.”²⁷ King George himself, who had previously advocated conciliation with the colonies, also turned to coercion by stating that “blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this country or independent.”²⁸

The above description of the situation leading into 1776 not only serves the purpose of stage setting for the events covered later but also provides an opportunity for discussion on controversies surrounding Howe and his actions during the war. There are differing opinions as to why Howe did poorly in commanding at the strategic level. One opinion argues that he was given unclear policy from his leadership and was therefore unable to develop an appropriate strategy to achieve the political objectives. The other opinion contends that he purposely missed opportunities because, being a sympathetic Whig, he was looking for a political solution rather than a military solution to

the conflict and therefore wanted to use “no more force than was necessary.”²⁹

Addressing the latter, there is no compelling evidence to support this assertion. Howe did make several blunders during his time as CinC but these can more logically be attributed to his failings as a commander rather than his underlying sympathy for the colonies. In reference to the former, the opinion does have merit up to a certain point. The British government did have a policy that initially focused more on conciliation than the use of concerted military force. However, this policy had changed to one of military coercion rather than a diplomatic solution by late 1775 (coinciding with Howe’s taking command). In fact, Howe on numerous occasions stated to his superiors that “only an overwhelming military defeat would convince the Americans of the futility of their rebellion.”³⁰ Through his own pronouncements, Howe was not confused as to what was expected of him. Instead his failure in accomplishing his objectives was likely due to his failings as a strategic leader.

The following narrative will trace Howe’s activities chronologically through his first year of command and assess his strategic leadership. Additionally, where events occur during Howe’s second year of command that illustrate the same failings, they will be appended to the first year’s discussion.

General Howe arrived in Boston in May of 1775 and was immediately thrown into the crucible of fire as he led the British forces on the attack on Bunker Hill. Although a costly British victory, at the end of the day, General Howe controlled the heights and still had troops in reserve who were relatively fresh. With the rebels retreating, tired, disheartened and low on ammunition, Howe missed an ideal opportunity to decisively defeat the Americans. Had Howe followed the urgings of General Clinton and pursued,

he had “every chance to destroy the Patriot force, and if this had been accomplished, and the besiegers driven from Boston, further bloodshed might well have been avoided.”³¹ However, Howe, lacking the conceptual skills to weigh the strategic opportunity against the tactical risk, did not pursue and instead allowed the battle to become a rallying cause for the Americans.

After Bunker Hill, General Gage was removed and General Howe was named Commander-in-Chief on 10 October 1775. At the time of his appointment, the British were surrounded in Boston on land by American forces commanded by General George Washington but still maintained freedom of the sea. While in Boston, Howe received orders from Lord Dartmouth to abandon the city and move to New York. Receiving these orders in November, Howe disregarded them and settled in for the winter.

Howe’s reasons for remaining in Boston were twofold. First, a lack of transport capacity made it impossible to displace all of the army, the Loyalists, and supplies in a single movement to New York and therefore a move would necessarily split Howe’s command. Secondly, the lateness of the season found the order arriving just as the treacherous winter gale season was beginning.³² In light of these facts, Howe’s decision to remain in Boston seems logical but what is difficult to explain is Howe’s inactivity during the winter in the city.

The winter of 1775-1776 was a period during which, had Howe exploited the strategic vulnerabilities of the Revolutionaries, he may have changed the outcome of the war. While Howe did have issues with supplies and manpower during this winter, Washington had even greater problems and the American Army appeared ripe for defeat. The American Army outside of Boston had a multitude of impediments ranging

from logistics to discipline. However, the most imminent issue for the Americans was the fact that, because of enlistments expiring the last day of 1775, the army was in jeopardy of dissolving.³³ Throughout this period, Washington anticipated a British attack that would exploit this weakness; yet none came. Instead the British remained in Boston without even a concerted raid on an American outpost. This inactivity by Howe allowed the Americans to essentially disband one Army and reform another all within a short distance of the enemy.³⁴ The result being that Washington was able to maintain and strengthen his position by February of 1776. This, coupled with the arrival of Henry Knox and the guns from Ticonderoga in March, permitted Washington to seize Dorchester Heights and force the British withdrawal from Boston under duress.

General Howe failed to grasp the strategic opportunities afforded during the winter in Boston. His lack of strategic vision prevented him from recognizing the opportunity presented by Washington's Army at this precarious time. The conduct of low risk harassing raids would likely have disrupted the foraging and recruiting efforts of Washington and, by extension, his ability to reform his army. At best, a deliberate attack could have destroyed the American Army during the transition. The seizure of the key terrain of Dorchester Heights (an objective that General Clinton implored Howe to secure) would have prevented Washington's use of this position to force the British from Boston. At first glance Dorchester Heights seems a tactical failure, which it was, but it was a failure with strategic implications. In dictating this withdrawal, Washington increased the credibility of the American cause both at home and in the international community "for with the forcing of the British from Boston the French began to seriously consider the possibilities of an American victory."³⁵

From the British perspective, activity by Howe during this winter could have accomplished numerous strategic benefits. First, is the obvious possibility of the destruction of the American Army or at least the hindering of the resupply and recruiting efforts as previously described. Secondly, continued offensive operations could have given the British a greater freedom of maneuver in the area, allowing for the foraging across the countryside for needed supplies. Thirdly, activity against the Americans would show British presence and initiative which could have garnered increased support from the Loyalists and the Neutrals in and around Boston. Support from these elements would make American efforts more difficult and could have facilitated the British efforts for resupply, information, and disruption of the Americans. Finally, although Howe already planned on departing from Boston in the spring, had he been able to do so of his own volition rather than Washington forcing his hand, he could have achieved several key strategic results. He could have prevented the Americans from using this as propaganda to garner support throughout the colonies as well as gaining many military supplies (by most estimates the British abandoned nearly 200 cannon, tons of shot, and warehouses full of powder in order to provide room for personnel).³⁶ He would have kept the international community from becoming more inclined to support the American cause. Furthermore, this scenario could have avoided the sense of abandonment felt by many Loyalists thus making support to the British more palatable for them in the future. Finally, his departure from Boston on his own terms would have improved the morale in his forces which was devastated by the forced withdrawal under American pressure.

Lacking a strategic perspective, these consequences were lost on Howe. Seemingly in Howe's mind nothing was to be gained in attacking the Americans as there appeared to be no decisive objectives to be attained.³⁷ This was plainly a tactical view of the situation rather than a strategic assessment of the greater implications.

Many attribute Howe's lethargic attitude while in Boston to the fact that he was enjoying his winter wallowing in the vices of gambling, drink, and women.³⁸ As historian William Seymour writes of the time "life in Boston for some was by no means unpleasant. There were parties and plays in the imposing Faneuil Hall, and a cosy mistress for Howe."³⁹ Clearly Howe was included in the privileged "some" described by Seymour. These same indictments would surface while Howe was in New York from 1776-1777 and in Philadelphia from 1777-1778. While it is likely that participation in these activities distracted Howe from his duties and clearly evidence a lack of self awareness and stewardship on his part (as these activities lead to a permissive environment for indiscipline), a greater contributor was his apparent inability to adapt his frame of reference to the changing strategic context.

Howe was a product of his experiences and, being schooled in the military tradition of the 18th century, "Howe closed his mind to the possibility of winter campaigns."⁴⁰ Therefore, it was perfectly natural to him to go into winter quarters and allow Washington to do the same. Succumbing to this preconceived limitation demonstrates his inability to expand his frame of reference and adjust to the current strategic environment.

Importantly, Howe would display these same limitations a year later during the winter of 1777 when he failed to mitigate for the defeat at Trenton and decided against

attacking Washington's Army of less than 4500 men at Morristown. The latter afforded Washington freedom of maneuver to forage, recruit, and build credibility across the countryside so that by early summer the American Army had nearly doubled in size.

General Howe would again fail to exploit Washington's relative weakness at Valley Forge in the winter of 1777-1778 resulting in two missed opportunities. First, by not attacking, Howe lost the chance to mitigate the strategic impacts of the British loss at Saratoga (discussed in detail later). Second, Howe's inaction again allowed Washington's Army to reconstitute and, in this case, permitted Baron Von Steuben freedom to train the army undisturbed. The latter resulted in a far more formidable foe facing the British in the summer of 1778.

Returning focus to the campaign of 1776, after departing Boston, Howe took his forces to Halifax and awaited reinforcements from England to support his strategy for the coming campaign season. Howe's plan for the campaign of 1776 was based upon key assumptions that reflected shortcomings in both his conceptual and technical competencies. Howe's strategy falsely determined that New England was the source of the revolution and, if isolated and defeated, other colonies would offer only token resistance before returning to the Crown. He also believed that by invading the colonies and seizing territory, he could force Washington to fight a decisive battle, thus providing the British the opportunity to destroy the American Army (what Howe saw as the revolution's Center of Gravity).

In his assessments, Howe unquestionably demonstrates strategic ineptitude. Howe failed to recognize that the revolutionary fervor had spread across the colonies and therefore, mistakenly believed that subduing New England would put an end to it.

Also, he overestimated his means for the conduct of the war as much of his strategy of seizing territory was dependent upon the support of the population (specifically the Loyalists). In reality, Howe, through his immoral conduct and the abusive actions of his army during the occupation of Boston, had severely damaged British credibility with the populace thus obviating their critical support.

Failing to comprehend the reality of the situation, Howe developed a strategy based upon these false assumptions. The resultant strategy being a British plan of seizing New York City and using it as a base of operations for securing the Hudson Valley and territories in New York and New Jersey. Howe believed he could force Washington to fight a decisive battle to keep the port city and regain territory that the Revolutionaries had lost to the British.

Significantly, in developing his strategy for a campaign in Philadelphia the following year (1777-1778), Howe again misjudged the spread of revolutionary fervor and the degree of support from the Loyalists and the Neutrals. The new strategy was therefore a repeat of a misalignment of resources to strategy and a faulty assessment of revolutionary resilience and support.

The campaigns of 1776 (New York) and 1777 (Philadelphia) were notable for their tactical successes yet strategic failures. In both years Howe continually outgeneraled Washington on the battlefield but consistently demonstrated an overall lack of appreciation for exploiting this success to achieve strategic victory. His assessment of the American Army as the Center of Gravity (COG) for the American cause was not followed by his exploitation of tactical victories. Instead, with strategic victory in the palm of his hand, Howe repeatedly allowed Washington's forces to

withdraw and reconstitute. This happened on multiple occasions with some of the most notable of 1776 being the battles of Long Island, Brooklyn Heights, Manhattan and White Plains. Likewise, in the campaign of 1777 he demonstrated the same lack of initiative at the battles of Brandywine and Germantown. Further, during both campaigns, Howe's sluggishness in his activities between battles allowed Washington time to regroup and reorganize in preparation for the next engagement.

Evidence abounds to support the above assessment. Prior to the battle of Long Island, Howe sat idly at Staten Island for six weeks while Washington continued to organize defenses. When Howe eventually attacked, he won the battle but at the expense of unnecessary British casualties--a cost the British would not have paid had the attack occurred sooner. While the aforementioned situation defies reason, more perplexing was Howe's failure to pursue the American Army through Brooklyn Heights. At the Heights, Howe "with everything going for him, his enemy bloodied, despondent, and in almost total disarray, did not follow up."⁴¹ Two days later Washington was able to retreat unscathed to Manhattan.

This scenario replayed itself at Harlem Heights when Howe took a full month to attack Washington's forces. In the ensuing amphibious assault on Throgs' Neck, Howe landed behind the Americans and, had he maneuvered boldly, could have encircled them and cut off their escape route. Howe, however, remained as cautious as ever and failed to quickly commence the attack thus permitting the Americans to escape to White Plains.⁴² Howe repeated this behavior in the fall of 1777; specifically at the battle of Brandywine. In a near repeat of Long Island, Howe defeated Washington at Brandywine forcing the Americans to retreat in disorder. In this case, instead of

pursuing the vulnerable American Army, Howe inexplicably ordered his army to encamp for the night. This delay cost Howe his “best chance in 1777 of destroying Washington’s Army.”⁴³

Uncharacteristically, Howe did seize the initiative after the battle of White Plains in November of 1776 when he supported Cornwallis’ pursuit of the American Army into New Jersey. Here was the opportunity to destroy the Americans as Cornwallis closed the gap swiftly, reaching New Brunswick less than a day behind Washington’s deteriorating force. However, in his ensuing decisions Howe again displayed an inability to grasp the strategic situation. First, he ordered Cornwallis to halt the pursuit until reinforcements could arrive (even though Cornwallis outnumbered Washington’s forces). Then, upon arriving on the scene, he showed no urgency in moving on Washington resulting in the American Army escaping across the Delaware unhindered.

Howe’s second in command, General Clinton, urged a continued pursuit, even to Philadelphia. Clinton argued that the planned expedition into Rhode Island by himself and 6,000 soldiers was less important than continuing to pursue Washington and advocated a “relentless chase, notwithstanding efforts at conciliation, the lateness of the season, or anything else that might damage the chance to crush the retreating Americans.”⁴⁴ Howe disregarded Clinton’s council and, in so doing, widened a rift between the two that had developed at Boston and would fester throughout the war. Instead, with the onset of winter, Howe ordered the establishment of winter quarters as, in his mind, the campaign season was over.

Once again, this “European way of war” was of great advantage to Washington as Howe’s continued inability to change his frame of reference on campaign seasons

allowed Washington the chance to recover from the harrowing defeats of the past six months. Many leaders in the American encampment were amazed at the lack of British offensive initiative but were thankful for it. Even General Washington was bewildered by the British inactivity as he knew that, had General Howe exerted only a small effort, he could have likely dispersed what remained of the American Army thus ending the Revolution.⁴⁵

At the end of 1776, Howe had returned to New York City with his army garrisoned in and around New York and New Jersey. General Howe returned to New York City where he began a winter of leisure as he continued to be courted by the Loyalist society elites. Unfortunately for Howe, Washington did not share the same narrow frame of reference in regards to campaign seasons. Howe learned this fact the hard way when, on the 25th of December 1776, Washington crossed the Delaware and defeated the Hessians at Trenton.

While all of the battles summarized had definite strategic impacts on the war, there were two watershed battles that occurred during Howe's command that dramatically altered the Revolution. The first was the battle of Trenton and the second was the battle of Saratoga. Although the magnitude of defeat and Howe's role was considerably different in both battles, in each case Howe had the opportunity to mitigate the negative strategic consequences of these defeats but failed to display the strategic acumen to do so.

The first focus is on the battle of Trenton. In late December Washington and the Continental Congress realized that the revolution was in a precarious position. Over the past six months the army had dwindled to less than 6,000 men and threatened to drop

further as enlistments expired and desertions increased. More important, the fervor for the struggle seemed to be declining among the American population as hardships increased and losses mounted. Grasping that he “had to ‘strike some stroke,’ even more for political and psychological reasons than for any immediate and possibly transitory military advantage”⁴⁶ Washington attacked Trenton and then showed the wherewithal to exploit his success by defeating the British at Princeton.

These successful attacks caused the British to evacuate most of the western parts of New Jersey thus abandoning most of their gains from the previous campaign. Significantly, the victories breathed new life into the American cause as the morale of the army and the population increased. Overseas, the victory won Washington laurels among European powers and, like Boston, provided fuel for the American cause--particularly with the French.

From the British perspective, Trenton as a tactical defeat was not a significant loss. However, Howe’s lack of strategic perspective again caused him to fail to fully grasp the political implications of the events or formulate an effective response to them. Thus a relatively minor tactical defeat grew into a strategic failure. At the core of Washington’s strategic victory was the forced withdrawal of the British from their Delaware line resulting in their abandonment of most of New Jersey. The highly visible withdrawal was a British embarrassment. It tarnished the aura of invincibility surrounding the British Army as the upstart rebel army regained nearly all of the territory that the British had gained over the past campaign. Moreover, the withdrawal also brought about the British desertion of the Loyalists and therefore precipitated a further decline in influence over both the Loyalists and the Neutrals. Finally, it presaged an

increase in support for the Revolution by both the Americans and the international community. Howe could have prevented most of the negative strategic fallout had he not allowed the situation to escalate beyond the simple tactical defeat of what was really just a non-essential outpost.

Significantly, after Trenton and Princeton, Howe had nearly 28,000 men in and around New York and New Jersey. In fact, in New Jersey alone, he had approximately 14,000 soldiers. This number was more than enough to reoccupy the cantonments along the Delaware, particularly since Washington had moved his forces back to Morristown. This reoccupation would have shown British resolve and confidence and would have reinforced the reality that the outcomes of these battles were fairly insignificant tactical losses for the British. Had Howe taken these steps, he likely would have mitigated the negative strategic influence of these losses.

In examining Howe's part in the British defeat at Saratoga in 1777 an understanding of the British situation in the winter of 1776 and their strategy for 1777 is needed. In terms of the situation, the campaign of 1776, although a tactical and operational success for the British, was a strategic disappointment. The American Army still existed, New England had not been isolated, and revolutionary fervor was on the rise while support for the British was in the decline both within the colonies and in the international community. The immense effort that the British government had expended in men and treasure had netted them the city of New York, and small outposts in eastern New Jersey.⁴⁷ Therefore, the British government was anxious for a strategy that would end the war in the coming year as the prospect of resourcing a protracted war was becoming less feasible. In response, Lord Germain, in conjunction with

Generals Burgoyne and Howe, developed a confusing and ambiguous strategy that led to a desynchronized British effort and ultimately the loss of a British Army.

In developing the strategy for 1777, Lord Germain approved a plan for General Burgoyne to move south from Canada, seize Lake Champlain and the Hudson River corridor and then fall under the command of General Howe. The plan was to “open a line of communication between Montreal and New York by way of the Hudson Valley, that would cut the colonies in two distinct parts that could be dealt with one at a time.”⁴⁸ Anticipated for Burgoyne’s movement south was support from General Howe’s forces. At the same time that Germain was approving the aforementioned strategy, he also approved a plan set forth by Howe to leave a small garrison in New York and New Jersey while the rest of his Army moved by ship to seize Philadelphia in the summer with the hope of forcing Washington to fight a decisive battle to protect the capitol.

Unmistakably these strategies were desynchronized as Howe’s forces would be unable to support Burgoyne if they were on ships or in Pennsylvania. Thus, the British campaign had no unifying concept. Moreover, Germain’s inability to establish a unified command structure, provide well defined strategic objectives and guidance, or account for the lack of support from the Loyalist and the Neutral population resulted in two totally uncoordinated campaigns.⁴⁹

Based on the above facts, many historians do not hold Howe accountable for Burgoyne’s failed campaign. They argue that Germain allowed the situation to develop by failing to synchronize the two efforts or specifically instruct Howe as to his responsibility for cooperation. However, Howe was well aware of the plan for invasion from the north and the subsequent subordinate relationship that Burgoyne’s army was

to assume. Therefore, he had a responsibility as the CinC to ensure operations were both coordinated and effective.

In reviewing these circumstances there are many areas where Howe as a strategic leader should have acted. First, Howe should have had the conceptual and technical wherewithal to review the plans, identify deficiencies, and make or advise changes to the strategy (particularly in unity of command and timing). Second, Howe should have applied what he had learned in 1776 in terms of the capabilities of the militia, the unreliability of support from the Loyalists, and the difficulty in gaining influence over the Neutrals and developed plans to support Burgoyne. The latter two are in reference to the fact that a large part of Burgoyne's strategy was based on Loyalist and Neutrals supporting his efforts, conditions that had not significantly surfaced for Howe in the previous year. Third, Howe should have shown the interpersonal skill to deal directly with Burgoyne in order to synchronize efforts as well as been open-minded to the arguments that General Clinton set forth in terms of objections to a ship-borne movement.

Howe did none of these things. His lack of conceptual, technical and interpersonal skills allowing him to accept the situation as it stood. In fact, he exacerbated the situation by leisurely planning and then delaying the beginning of his own campaign for Philadelphia until the early summer and by leaving only a small garrison of 3,000 men under General Clinton in New York. These two factors, coupled with the fact that Howe embarked on ships en route to Philadelphia, made it implausible for Germain or Burgoyne to expect any support from Howe.

Howe eventually began his campaign on 17 July when he departed with 17,000 troops from New York Harbor heading for a landing on the Chesapeake. By this time Burgoyne had started his move south from Canada but neither general was aware of the location of the other and Lord Germain was totally unaware of Howe's movements. Evidently, Howe did not connect the importance of the two campaigns in supporting each other and therefore made no concerted effort to contact Burgoyne or Germain to provide simple updates which could have at least provided some coordination of movements. In fact, the last time that Howe wrote to Burgoyne was in early July. Germain complained throughout the summer that "for a period of longer than two months he knew no more of the whereabouts of the General or what he was doing than did the man on the street."⁵⁰

Furthermore, Howe showed a lack of foresight in his failure to provide for strategic options by removing himself from the strategic decision-making and in his failure to provide Clinton with "specific orders to take action on the lower Hudson, and sufficient regular troops with which to do so."⁵¹ Howe's interpersonal failures came to the fore in this situation where his distaste for criticism and personal closed-mindedness surfaced in his response to Clinton's arguments as to why a sea-borne move was ill advised. Howe's answer to this being "I have sent my plan home and it has been approved."⁵²

The result of the ensuing fiasco was the defeat of Burgoyne at the battle of Saratoga and the loss of the entire northern army with the obvious accompanying strategic ramifications. While Howe was not directly involved in the battle, his actions did contribute to the loss. More importantly, Howe's inaction after the loss resulted in

another missed opportunity as Howe failed to take action to mitigate the effects of Saratoga by exploiting Washington's weakness at Valley Forge.

While the defeat at Saratoga was a significant event in terms of raising support for the Revolutionaries among the American population, the consequences were even greater in England and within the international community -- specifically for France. In the case of the former, the loss at Saratoga emboldened the Whig and public opposition to the war making it even more difficult to gather resources to continue the war. In the case of France, prior to reports of the American victory at Saratoga, King Louis XVI had refused to formally recognize the American cause for over a year. This all changed when, in mid December, Louis learned of the capture of Burgoyne's Army. Within three months of receiving the news, the French ambassador to England informed the British that "France had recognized American independence and had signed a Treaty of Alliance with America."⁵³ Soon afterwards, France sent a fleet and troops to assist the Americans in their efforts. Placing the British in a situation where the American problem had escalated from a troublesome colonial uprising to a world war.⁵⁴

Howe had the opportunity to prevent this escalation from occurring had he seized the opportunity presented him in the winter of 1777-1778. By 10 December, 1777 Howe had occupied Philadelphia and controlled the Delaware River Lines of Communication (LOCs). At this point both armies moved into winter quarters with Washington at Valley Forge and Howe in Philadelphia. Howe already knew of the defeat at Saratoga and, realizing that he would shoulder much of the blame for the loss, had sent his letter of resignation to England in late November.

Howe's letter of resignation did not equate to the end of his command. Obviously the King had to approve the resignation and therefore, Howe still had a war to fight. Washington's Army was only 18 miles distant and was struggling to survive as an entity. With reports pouring in daily describing Washington's forces as "in no fit state to resist assault,"⁵⁵ Howe had a major opportunity to attack and defeat the American Army. Had Howe seized the initiative, he could have likely reversed the loss at Saratoga by making it a moot point.

In December, the defeat of Saratoga was only weeks old and the French had not yet decided to take an active military role in the American Revolution. A defeat of Washington's Army at this critical juncture could have both ended the Revolution and also prevented the French from conducting a war against Britain across the globe. Howe, however, decided against this action and instead, "sat snugly in his quarters at Philadelphia surrounded by his magnificent forces and enjoying nightly bouts of gambling and drink with the Sultana."⁵⁶ Howe would remain "snug" in Philadelphia until his replacement by General Clinton in May and his departure for England shortly thereafter.

Trenton and Saratoga both present evidence that Howe, unlike Washington, did not possess the strategic perspective to understand the political and psychological consequences of these battles. His inability to use integrative cognitive skills to connect the effects of the American actions and his own inaction led to the strategic defeats that would have a long term effect on the outcome of the war. The most prominent of these effects being dispelling the perception of British invincibility which led to France's indirect and then, after Saratoga, direct involvement in the conflict.

Howe's Two Years of Strategic Leadership Flaws Analyzed

Trenton, Saratoga and Valley Forge are just a few examples of Howe's incompetence as a strategic leader during his two years in command. Starting with Boston and ending with a lack of offensive initiative at Valley Forge, both campaigns were marked by tactical successes but strategic failure. Howe entered the war with the strategy of destroying the American Army but repeatedly failed to follow up on a multitude of tactical successes that could have achieved victory. His inability to grasp and integrate the political, psychological, and military aspects of the strategic environment caused him to be more cautious than was required in America. By allowing Washington's Army to survive, Howe allowed them to gain credibility and concurrently decreased the aura of invincibility that surrounded the British Army. This aura had kept others in check for fear of becoming enemies of the British. When the world saw that the British dominance was in question, then credibility began to shift to the side of the Revolutionaries. The perception gave the Revolutionaries hope and caused the Neutrals and Loyalists alike to either support the Revolutionaries or to hold off overt support to the British. Observing a vulnerable Britain, other nations became emboldened; taking the opportunity to challenge British hegemony for their own gains.

Another result of Howe's ineffective strategy was that it allowed Washington to develop as a strategic leader. In contrast to Howe, Washington was able to alter his conceptual and technical competencies learning from his defeats and adjusting his strategy. To this end, Washington learned from the campaigns of 1776 that his chances of defeating the British Army in one decisive conventional battle were slim. He therefore transformed his strategy into a war of exhaustion. Washington realized that the Revolution's COG was the American Army and that for the British, "it is our arms, not

defenceless towns, they have to subdue.”⁵⁷ To this end, Washington sought to fight only when the conditions nearly guaranteed an American victory. The rest of the time he focused operations on interdicting and disrupting British efforts through raids and attacks on the British LOCs and Loyalist supporters in order to deplete the enemies will and resources.⁵⁸ This Fabian strategy would deny Howe his objective of destroying the American Army and, in protracting the war, it had strategic consequences for the British in terms of resources, resolve, and support for the American cause abroad. Had Howe exploited his successes against Washington when he was inclined to stand and fight at New York or Brandywine, the two Generals may have exchanged their respective legacies.

In searching for reasons for Howe’s actions, it becomes clear that part of this stems from his lack of self awareness and a continued inability to alter his conceptual frame of reference. This is illustrated in the review of the battle of Bunker Hill as well as a discussion on Howe’s development.

As pointed out, Bunker Hill was a Pyrrhic victory. During the battle, Howe’s charge was repulsed three times before securing victory at the summit. This near failure left an impression on Howe that stayed with him throughout his command. His experience shaped his frame of reference so that, after Bunker Hill, Howe became overly cautious and failed to exploit even obvious tactical advantages if it meant a direct assault on the enemy.⁵⁹ This is a sound tactic unless the destruction of the enemy COG hangs in the balance and the enemy is vulnerable as was the case on numerous occasions during the war.

In terms of his avoidance of winter campaigns and penchant for ponderous movements, it must be remembered that Howe was a product of his training in the “European way of war.” Even though he was a “hero” from the Seven Years’ War, his experiences in America, Canada, and Europe inculcated reliance on large maneuver formations and set campaign seasons. These experiences, both Bunker Hill and Howe’s development, formed the foundation of Howe’s frame of reference and he lacked the self awareness and cognitive acumen to adapt this frame of reference to the existing strategic and operational conditions. This in turn led to an inability or unwillingness to change his strategy or institute an innovative approach to the conflict.

Another thread which surfaces over the campaigns was Howe’s failure to appreciate the effect that his actions had on Loyalists and Neutrals of the American population. A large part of Howe’s strategy relied on rallying the Loyalists and garnering support from the fence-sitting Neutrals. This would help secure occupied territory and reduce the crucial support to the American Army from the populace. Some key elements for Howe’s strategy to work were: the initial establishment of security, the establishment of local forces, and a building of credibility and trust among the population (showing them that they had more to gain by supporting the British cause than that of the Revolutionaries).

Despite recognizing the importance of gaining the support of the population for his cause and degrading their support for the Revolutionary cause, Howe routinely undermined his strategy. Repeatedly Howe occupied areas of the countryside only to abandon them at a later date. In doing so he also abandoned the Loyalists and the Neutrals in the territory. Trust and confidence was further eroded as the Loyalists and

the Neutrals watched the British failure to exploit their tactical victories and thus allow Washington's Army to survive. Thus, the British were perceived as unreliable protectorates who callously abandoned the population to the enemy whenever they were confronted by the slightest risk, were unable to defeat a ragtag army, and were forced to relinquish territory back to the rebels.

Aggravating this situation was the British Army's abusive treatment of the population of occupied territories. Over the course of the campaigns, the British Army arbitrarily mistreated the colonists. While foraging was expected to keep the army supplied, too often the activities far surpassed foraging and degraded to pillaging and rape. In New Jersey some of the worst misconduct of the war occurred as the British "indiscriminately terrorized the rebels, the apathetic and the Loyalists."⁶⁰ Even the cities that Howe established as his headquarters were not exempted from these acts. As evidence, Prominent Loyalist leaders describe the conditions in Boston and New York during British occupation as an environment where "plunder, robberies, speculation, whoring, gaming, and all kinds of dissipation were cherished, nursed, encouraged and openly courted."⁶¹

This reputation for arbitrarily disregarding property and persons had negative long term effects. A fact substantiated in the campaign of 1777 when Howe, whose strategy in Pennsylvania was based largely on support of the population, failed to receive "the warm welcome which he had planned so carefully to encourage."⁶² This situation was a setback for the British who counted on this support to create a relatively friendly environment which would aid the British during operations. Unfortunately, the stories of the British Army's treatment of civilians both in regards to looting and

abandonment preceded their arrival creating an environment where the population sought to “protect their own property and persons and postponed committing themselves until they could see which party could offer them the most protection.”⁶³

Consequently, the failure of Howe’s conceptual and technical competencies is evident. Howe’s inability to recognize that his and his army’s previous actions had alienated the population, contributed to his development of a flawed strategy dependent on support of the populace that was not forthcoming. Thus, Howe was forced to conduct the campaign in an environment that was not friendly in terms of succor, intelligence, and manpower.

In his defense, Howe did publish proclamations enacting punishments for the rank and file if caught committing undue harm to the people.⁶⁴ However, Howe’s orders were non-specific and left much to the discretion of his soldiers. Further, Howe, did not hold his officers accountable for the actions of their men. Moreover, his own lack of moral fidelity undermined discipline and created a command environment where a blind eye was turned to the looting and other transgressions. It is in this type of activity, explained British General James Grant to the House of Commons, that “lose you friends and gain you enemies.”⁶⁵ Had Howe been more attuned to the debilitating effects of these issues he could have made more deliberate efforts to curb the destructive behavior of his army. All told, Howe’s lack of self awareness and underdeveloped conceptual and technical competencies undermined a key factor in his strategy: that of cementing the will of the people against the rebellion.

Reviewing Howe’s conduct from an interpersonal lens magnifies his strategic failings. Effective strategic leaders develop an inclusive environment when leading

peers or near peers. Unfortunately, Howe was not adept at interpersonal skills and usually resorted to positional power when dealing with subordinates. An example is when, after Clinton continued to advocate pursuit of Washington across the Delaware, Howe told him to “stop arguing and do as he was told.”⁶⁶ Further, when he did hold counsels of war, the activity was more pro forma than substantive.

Known for a disdain of opinions other than those that supported his own, Howe’s inner circle consisted of people who validated his opinions while those who offered contrary feedback were excluded. An obvious example of this was Howe’s contempt for the well thought out argument of Clinton in terms of the unsoundness of Howe’s strategy for Pennsylvania in 1777. Clinton’s opinion was shared by numerous officers, including Sir William Erskine who was on Howe’s personal staff and offered that a “march north toward Burgoyne would be far preferable to an invasion of Pennsylvania.”⁶⁷ To the detriment of his command, Howe had already made up his mind and his interpersonal skills, marked by stubbornness and a dislike for Clinton, did not allow for an open-minded discussion on the strategy. His failure to accept ideas from a broad range of perspectives clearly limited Howe’s options. Describing Howe, author Samuel B. Griffith summarizes accounts of British officers in dealings with him:

In his professional relationships, the British commander in chief was a taciturn man. He kept a great deal of thinking to himself. He consulted Cornwallis and was usually attentive to his suggestions. He listened reluctantly to Generals Clinton and Grant. He never took more than a cursory notice of recommendations made by his Hessian subordinates.⁶⁸

Howe’s traits described by Griffith did nothing to create an inclusive environment or build consensus but instead alienated his leaders resulting, in many cases, in dissention and withholding of advice. Confronted with a new and different kind of war,

this limited Howe's perspective on the complex issues he was required to address and often resulted in suboptimal solutions.

A final look at Howe as a strategic leader focuses on his failure as a steward of his profession. A strategic leader is the standard bearer and face of an organization both internally and externally. Thus, it is his duty to set the example for others to follow. General Howe, throughout his two years in command, consistently displayed a lack of stewardship through his conduct off the battlefield. During his two years in command, his philandering, womanizing, and penchant for gambling alienated many both internal to his organization and externally.

In every campaign there are reports of Howe's debauchery. This situation not only hampered Howe's ability to influence local leaders and the overall population directly, but indirectly as well. In the case of the former, Howe's example disgusted much of the conservative religious groups who made up the majority of the population in America. In the case of the latter, Howe's actions as the steward of the organization, affected the discipline of his soldiers and officers alike. If the commander is advocating (with his behavior) gambling and womanizing then the troops will start doing the same. This creates a culture of lower values and morals which then makes larger indiscretions more likely. The breakdown in discipline can then devolve into more destructive behavior, for example, the pillaging that dissolved support of the population in New Jersey. This situation not only adversely affects the organization but, as Howe's actions fostered a climate that allowed for human rights abuses by his Soldiers, it indirectly affected Howe's ability to influence the population.

Another indicator of Howe's poor stewardship was the criticism that his officer corps' professionalism and standards had severely decreased since he took command. The reason is blamed on excessive gambling that caused many officers to sell out in payment of debts, resulting in their replacement by men of far lower virtue and merit. The account goes on to assign blame to the bad example set by Howe.⁶⁹ These circumstances identify Howe's lack of self awareness in terms of his understanding of his role as a steward of his profession and the standard bearer for the British Army.

General Howe Post-Revolution

Howe sailed for England on 25 May 1778 a despondent man. His three years spent in America had been ones of frustration and missed chances that caused his reputation to slip from that of the best commander in the army to a General incapable of defeating Washington's ragtag rebels. Over the next three years, Howe was forced to constantly justify his strategy and battlefield decisions. During this period numerous critics came forward to condemn his actions during the war citing weakness of character, incompetence, and an affinity for the Rebels as a few of Howe's shortcomings. After a Parliamentary inquiry found that Howe was not negligent in his command, Howe returned to military service and commanded the northern and then eastern military districts of England (mainly a token position). He retired in 1803 after 57 years of service but was never able to regain the renown that he enjoyed in May of 1775. General Howe died in 1805 a haunted and aggrieved man troubled by the specter of the Revolution and the continued accusations by many of his fault for the British loss.⁷⁰

Conclusion

In considering Howe's conduct during the American Revolution, historian Bellamy Partridge provides a quote attributed to General Clinton that provides insight into the thoughts of many leaders at the time:

Had Sir Wm Howe Fortified the Hills round Boston, he could not have been disgracefully driven from it: Had he pursued his Victory at Long Island, he had ended the Rebellion: Had he landed above the lines at New York, not a man could have escaped him: Had he fought the Americans at Brunswick he was sure of Victory: Had he co-operated with the Northern Army, he had saved it, or had he gone to Philadelphia by land, he had ruined Mr. Washington and his Forces; But as he did none of these things, had he gone to the D—l, before he was sent to America, it had been the saving of infamy to himself and indelible dishonor to this Country.⁷¹

This quote provides a good summary of Howe's actions and inactions as the CinC of the British Army in America during the Revolution. Significant is the recurring theme of missed opportunities. As illustrated throughout this paper, Howe's time as CinC was beset with missed opportunities and misaligned strategy. The strategic consequences of the aforementioned were catastrophic for the British effort and ultimately lead to his resignation.

Whereas Howe experienced tactical and operational success prior to and during the Revolution, a war in which he never personally lost a battle, his inability to understand and adapt to the unique demands of leadership at the strategic level proved his downfall. Impaired by a predilection against study and self development, Howe did not learn from recurring strategic failures. Over the course of two years he repeatedly demonstrated rigidity in his frame of reference, immoral behavior, interpersonal incompetence, and conceptual ineptitude. These shortcomings in strategic

competencies not only allowed the Revolutionary cause to survive but to prevail. Howe's failings in these competencies are legion.

In developing strategy he showed a miscalculation in terms of resource to strategy association. His two campaigns called for occupation of large amounts of territory yet he did not have the manpower to secure this territory. In recognizing that he would require Loyalist and Neutral support to account for the shortfalls in British manpower, he took only inconsequential measures to foster this support. This resulted in campaign strategies that were under-resourced in terms of manpower and supplies (recall that the British Army was intended to survive based on supplies from the countryside). While he made many other errors in strategy, this misalignment of resources to strategy was paramount.

As outlined in Clinton's description, Howe failed to take advantage of numerous opportunities to destroy Washington's Army; opportunities that arguably would have broken the will of the Americans. These missed opportunities fed the fire of revolution in America and abroad as they built confidence in the Americans' cause and ability to win. Conversely, these same missed opportunities lowered the British morale and decreased their support from the Loyalists and Neutrals. Many factors compounded this situation but it was Howe's inability to connect military, political and psychological importance of exploiting tactical victories or mitigating defeats (as was the case of Trenton) that contributed to strategic failure. Thus he allowed Trenton to go unanswered and Saratoga to go unavenged.

Interpersonally, Howe's lack of open mindedness, self reliance and biases towards those with differing opinions did not foster an inclusive environment. In fact,

Howe's alienation of many of his key leaders lead to a situation where limited strategic options were considered in extremely complex circumstances. Further, Howe's own self awareness was wanting in terms of personal shortcomings and biases leading to his indirectly fostering an environment tolerant of indiscipline and unethical conduct.

All of these shortcomings were interconnected as each had an effect on the other. For instance, Howe's taking no significant steps to prevent the mistreatment of the population resulted in less support for the British which in turn affected strategy. However, Howe lacked the strategic ability to perceive either these cause and effect relationships or the long term second and third order effects of his actions or inactions. This inability contributed to his failure and Washington's success.

Examining General Howe's conduct under the framework provided by the strategic leadership competencies may, on the surface, seem irrelevant in the context of today's strategic environment. Many may question how the actions and shortcomings of a General from nearly two and a half centuries past provide a lesson for military leaders of this century. The answer to this is simple, strategic leadership is a timeless ability that must be honed during any century. Just as the nature of war is unchanging, the competencies required of a strategic leader are unchanging as well. While the environment in which today's strategic leaders operate is different from that in which General Howe operated, the need to master the conceptual, interpersonal and technical competencies in order to succeed at the strategic level remains.

Today's strategic leader must be able to ensure that his strategy is aligned with resources, understand the interconnectedness of short term and long term actions, and recognize opportunities to translate tactical successes into a larger strategic victory. In

addition, these same leaders must be able to build consensus in order to unify efforts toward informed and well thought out decisions. All of the aforementioned are requirements that Howe failed to achieve during his time as CinC but had he achieved them, the outcome of the Revolution may have been vastly different. Arguably, today's strategic leaders must be even more cognizant of these requirements as they now operate in an environment of increased complexity with a multitude of stakeholders and immediate scrutiny of actions through globalized information networks.

Studying General Howe therefore affords leaders with an illustrative example of the challenges of transitioning to leadership at the strategic level and the importance of preparing oneself in terms of education and development for operating at this level. Examining a strategic leader who failed to make this transition provides an important example of ineptitude across the range of strategic leader competencies and a stark historical image of the dire consequences of strategic leadership failure.

Endnotes

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⁴ Gerras, *Strategic Leadership Primer*, 28.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

¹⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹¹ Ibid., 32.

¹² Ibid., 32.

¹³ Ibid., 33.

¹⁴ Ibid., 33.

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